

THE NEGRO MOVEMENT

Revolutionary Tasks in the West Indies.

By Georg Padmore (U. S. A.).

Since the Hoover-MacDonald gesture of Anglo-American relationship with respect to the reduction of armaments, the West Indies have come sharply to the front as one of the most vital problems in the present naval controversy.

The "New York Times", the official organ of American finance-capital, recently stated that if the British "Labour" Government is sincere in its professions for better relations between Great Britain and the United States, MacDonald's first act would be to demolish the British Naval Bases at Halifax, Bermuda, Jamaica, and Trinidad. For these bases represent a challenge to America's naval power in the Atlantic, and command the strategic approaches to the Panama Canal.

Despite the proposal of the American naval strategists, the Hoover-Wall Street Government continues to strengthen its grip upon the Latin American Republics on the one hand, and the Caribbean islands (Cuba, Haiti, Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands) on the other, so as to prepare for the inevitable clash between these two imperialist giants.

The situation has become more intensified since the Young Reparations Plan and the new tariff bill which has already provoked general protest, especially amongst the European Powers with Great Britain and France in the lead.

The accelerated internal and external contradictions between these and other imperialist nations are making for new realignments and together with this, we see the feverish preparations which are being made among the capitalist states. In view of this, it is no accident that the question of abolishing the British West Indian Naval Bases should be raised at this time during the manoeuvres between these two antagonistic capitalist imperialist powers — Great Britain and the U. S. A.

The present economic, social, and political conditions of the toiling masses in the West Indies makes the situation favourable for revolutionary propaganda and mass work along trade union lines. In the largest of the British colonies, Jamaica and Trinidad, as well as British Guiana, on the mainland of South America, the post-war industrialisation is producing a well crystallised proletariat and semi-proletariat.

Within recent years, the natural resources of these colonies have undergone tremendous developments. This is especially so in Trinidad where there are extensive deposits of asphalt (pitch), and oil. The exclusive right of digging for asphalt has been granted to the New Trinidad Lake Asphalt Co. Ltd. of London, and the lake which covers an area of 114 acres, with an unfathomable depth is a source of great revenue to the Colonial Government and profits for the company. The export of asphalt in 1926

was 180,950 metric tons valued at £451,967, from which the Government derived a revenue of £88,303. The bulk of the asphalt is exported to the United States, where it is chiefly employed in construction work and paving streets. Thousands of Negroes are employed to dig the pitch and to load the ships at La Brea, the principal shipping port for this industry. These men get an average of thirty cents per day, and live under horrible conditions. There is little or no labour legislation for their protection. Most of them are still unorganised and therefore helpless to resist the companies' repressive measures and the terrorism of the government. Spontaneous strikes frequently occur, but the lack of militant leadership and organisational methods of the class struggle are the present problems confronting these colonial slaves. The same situation exists in all the other industries.

Trinidad is one of the chief British controlled oil producing centres in the New World; and is the principal naval base off the South American coast for the North Atlantic and Caribbean fleet of the British Navy.

The southern section of the island is described as a lake of oil. The output of petroleum in 1927 was 5,380,464 barrels; 4,971,000 in 1926 and 4,387,000 in 1925, from about 1,000 wells. These figures indicate the upward trend of production. All the companies are under British financial control, but large numbers of American and native drillers are employed. The Pearson and Royal Dutch Shell Companies hold the biggest interests in oil industry.

The vast majority of the workers employed on the various oil fields are Negroes. Within recent years Hindus have been attracted to the industry. The wages are shockingly low and the standard of living primitive. As a result of the predominant interest concentrated in the oil industry, the extensive beds of coal of considerable thickness which cross the island from coast to coast have not been touched.

Exclusive of mining, Trinidad, like most of the West Indies, is largely agricultural. The principal products are: cocoa, sugar, copra, coconuts, rum, molasses and fruit. Millions of dollars worth of these products are exported to the United States and Europe annually. Despite the intensive campaign being carried on by the British Empire Chamber of Commerce, the Colonial Institute of London and local British imperial organisations, American business is giving British competitors the battle of their lives. The following table shows the increased volume of trade between Trinidad and the United States. This again indicates that Britain is not only losing out in Latin America, Canada, and in Asia, but also in her Caribbean possessions.

Year	Imports	Exports
1922	\$4,872,198	\$4,519,754
1923	\$4,394,054	\$5,161,979
1924	\$3,822,403	\$4,862,208
1925	\$4,028,891	\$5,969,984
1926	\$4,905,135	\$8,234,031
1927	\$5,929,560	\$7,642,936

Because of the agricultural importance of Trinidad, the agrarian problem is one of great importance. The manufacturing of sugar with its by-products, rum and molasses, represent the second industry of importance, and is chiefly carried on in large factories called "usines", the largest being St. Madeline, situated in the southern part of the island. San Fernando, the second port of the colony, is the chief shipping centre for the sugar industry. Hundreds of ships call there yearly and thousands of longshoremen and porters are employed on the docks. There are over seventy large sugar plantations yielding more than 100,000 tons of sugar annually. Before the war, a large percentage of the sugar cane used to be cultivated by peasant-farmers who sold their crops to the factories. These farmers owned the land, but the present trend is to abolish small holdings and to concentrate the lands of the farmers into big plantations controlled by British corporations and absentee landlords. In this way the peasants are fast becoming a landless semi-proletariat, working part of the time on the land and another part in industry and the oil fields. The land problem is the biggest issue in the country today. The farmers are in revolt against the big landlords and the government, for they realise that their condition is getting daily worse.

In discussing the West Indian problem we have to take into consideration the geographical factor. Trinidad is only sixteen miles off the coast of Venezuela which is today one of America's greatest oil producing centres. The proximity makes the island

one of tremendous importance to Britain as a naval base. In event of war, Port-of-Spain could be used as a submarine base as was done during the last war to menace the enemy's shipping along the South American route. This view point is supported by the public statement of a British militarist.

Jamaica is the largest and most valuable of the British possessions in the Caribbean Sea. It covers an area of about 4,674 square miles including the out-lying islands, and has a population of 936,927. Jamaica occupies a rather strategic position, guarding the Windward Passage, a narrow strait between the islands of Cuba and Haiti, which are controlled by the United States.

Unlike Trinidad there is little or no mining carried on in Jamaica. The industries are entirely agricultural. Her chief products are: sugar, rum, coconuts, molasses, copra, bananas, oranges, and other tropical fruit. The sugar production in 1924/25 was about 50,000 tons and rum 1,250,000 gallons. In the large towns there are tanneries, iron foundries, electric light plants, gas and water works, which employ thousands of Negro workers. The manufacture of cigars (considered among the best in the world), cigarettes, matches, dyes, lime juice, soap, coconut oil, ice, malt, meal and starch also yield considerable profits.

In the rural district much attention is paid to the breeding of live stock, including horses, cattle and mules. The United States of America enjoys the greatest portion of the foreign trade with the island, the United Kingdom comes next with Canada third. The banana and orange trade is chiefly carried on with the United States, but rum and sugar are exported in large quantities to England and other parts of the British Empire. The United Fruit Company of New York has a monopoly of the banana industry.

The following table shows the trade relationship with the United States:

Year	Imports	Exports
1922	\$8,196,249	\$7,261,979
1923	\$8,837,000	\$6,626,261
1924	\$7,291,083	\$6,174,493
1925	\$8,944,853	\$8,237,611
1926	\$8,585,633	\$9,110,754
1927	\$8,640,627	\$9,722,893

Apart from the industries described, the marine workers are an important section of the working class. The bulk of the workers employed as sailors, longshoremen, boatmen, etc. in West Indian ports are Negroes. The big ocean liners are unable to dock along the piers in West Indian ports, and are therefore compelled to load and unload cargo in barges, and the only available labour for this kind of seaport-work is Negro labour. Nearly all the big steamship companies employ black seamen and stevedores to handle cargo throughout the West Indies. Therefore, the organisation of these workers will be a tremendous weapon for the revolutionary movement and should not be neglected. The organisation of a West Indian Marine Federation would represent the key to the entire industrial situation, for in insular countries such as the West Indies everything depends upon marine transportation. The internal transportation systems such as railroads, street-car, bus and taxicab companies are all operated by native workers. The same applies to electric lighting, gas and other public utilities. Here again organisational steps should be taken to bring these workers together under the banner of industrial unionism.

In racial composition the population of Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana resemble each other. The majority of the population are Negroes, referred to as blacks and mulattoes. In Jamaica there are 645,000 blacks, 163,000 mulattoes, 18,000 East Indians, indentured "coolie" labourers brought from India to work on the sugar cane plantations; 15,600 European and American whites, 2,100 Chinese and 3,520 other Asiatics. On an average there are about 190 inhabitants to every square mile and in proportion to its size, Jamaica is more thickly populated than any European country. This, together with the horrible economic condition of the natives, accounts for the large numbers of Negroes who leave Jamaica annually to work on the Cuban sugar cane plantations and recently in the Colombian banana district where they have been used to break the strike of the Spanish workers. Besides these two large colonies described, there are a number of smaller but equally important islands from a naval and economic point of view, under British control. They are scattered from the coast of Florida to the mouth of the Orinoco River.

these include the Bahamas, with a population of about 200,000. This group of islands form a semi-circle from the south of Florida to the north coast of Cuba, and serve as an important naval base in the Atlantic. South of the Bahamas are the **Windward Islands** which extend as far as Trinidad, the most northerly of the group.

A glance at any map of the Caribbean area will confirm the importance of every one of these islands from a naval aspect. It is therefore no surprise to hear of the demands of the American imperialists to their British rivals about demolishing these naval strongholds as a guarantee of "good faith", at this time when the hypocritical pacifist parley between Ambassador Dawes, the representative of American capitalism, and MacDonald, the contemtable lackey of British Imperialism, are taking place in order to lead the working class with their empty gestures of peace. The conferences in London are part of the smoke screen of imperialism behind with the capitalist class is preparing to plunge the workers of Europe and America, as well as the colonial masses into another international slaughter. We must answer the intrigues by arousing the broadest mass of colonials and the colonials against their imperialist oppressors, and in that link up their fight for freedom with the struggles of the great masses of the home countries for the final overthrow of the system of exploitation.

In Trinidad the trade union movement, with 70,000 members, is controlled by the Workingmen's Association, which is its sister organisation in British Guiana, is affiliated with the British "Labour" Party. Despite the unfortunate relationship, the colonial trade union organisations wield a tremendous influence in local politics and already have the biggest mass basis of the various political groupings. In the colonial legislatures, the majority of the elected representatives are labour leaders. However, the majority of these so-called leaders of the masses are not workers, but petty-bourgeois intellectuals who exploit the mass following behind the labour parties for their own ends. Nevertheless, the social composition of the West Indian labour organisations is really proletarian, but the workers have not yet produced their own cadres, but let the shrewd intellectuals (lawyers, journalists, teachers, doctors, etc.) assume leadership. These cunning politicians maintain themselves in popular favour by playing with revolutionary phrases while at the same time betraying every struggle of the workers.

As a result of this opportunist leadership, all the parties suffer from ideological weakness. The masses are a hundred per cent. to the left than the leaders. This stage of political backwardness is reflected in the confused editorial columns of the "Trinidad Labour Leader", the official organ of the Trinidad Labour Party. Exclusive of the corrupt petty bourgeois leadership two main causes for the present ideological weakness can be attributed: 1. the corrupting influence of the British "Labour" Party, 2. the isolation of these young colonial movements from the influence of genuine revolutionary struggles.

An indication of the fighting qualities of the West Indian workers was the longshoremen's strike in Port-of-Spain in 1924. In the only series of militant strikes have occurred in Jamaica. The Jamaican Negroes have that most revolutionary tradition among the Caribbean blacks. From the days of the Maroon insurrections to this, they have been considered the most bellicose as living under British military rule. They are heroic, liberty-loving and aggressive. They are easily won over to revolutionary propaganda as they are very sensitive to oppression, in consequence of which the British government has always ruled Jamaica at the point of the bayonet.

The greatest need among the West Indian workers is leadership -- ideological and organisational. There is a strong link between racial solidarity between the blacks and the East Indians who have lived side by side for years without a single instance of race conflict. This is very much unlike the situation between the black and white workers in the United States and in Africa. This solidarity between the West Indian blacks and East Indians can be explained by the fact that both groups make up the bulk of the working class, and are subjected to the same system of ruthless exploitation by the mulattoes and whites, who form the privileged classes in West Indian society. Steps must be taken to overcome the isolation of the European and American labour movement from the Caribbean colonies and to assist the labour movements in strengthening their political ideology and trade union organisations. In the field of labour union activities, the co-operation of the T. U. E. L. and

the A. N. L. C. in America, and the Minority Movement in England would be very effective. The All America Anti-Imperialist League and the European Leagues Against Imperialism should also pay more attention to this section of the colonial world. Apart from the labour groups there are large and influential youth organisations and clubs in all of the colonies. Although chiefly cultural, they nevertheless show much interest in the political affairs of the countries. This is especially so among the East Indians. In Trinidad there is an **East Indian National Congress** and a **National Association**, representing the Hindu and Mohammedan wings of the national revolutionary movement of India. These organisations, like the West India Federation Movement, should be brought closer to the League Against Imperialism. Like the Negro intellectuals in these colonies, the young East Indian students intellectuals are ardent nationalists, and as such, are opposed to British domination. But these anti-imperialist elements are confused, and chiefly manifest their dissatisfaction in useless and ineffective squabbles among themselves. What they need is proper leadership and a proper understanding of their problems.

A revolutionary cadre is the most urgent need today in order to take the lead and direct the working class into **independent mass action** so as to break with the petty bourgeois leadership. Efforts should also be made to unite the various labour movements of the different islands into a **West Indian Labour Federation or Congress**, in order to overcome the present insularity which exists among them. Labour organisations should be won over to the R. I. L. U. The coming international trade union conference of Negro workers and other labour groups set for July 1930 should be the unifying force in the West Indies as well as linking up the struggles of the Negro workers throughout the United States, the African colonies, and South America.

The Negro workers and farmers are still to a very large extent under the illusion that the intellectuals of their race are their best leaders. This is especially so in the colonies, where these treacherous leaders fake an aggressive attitude towards the imperialists while at the same time betraying the workers. This false ideology has to be ruthlessly combated in order to expose the counter-revolutionary role of this middle-class leadership and fight for the hegemony of the workers in alliance with the peasantry, for this is the only way in which the emancipation and victory of the oppressed colonial masses can be assured.

PROLETARIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The White Terror Employed against the Women Workers of Yugoslavia.

By Vera (Zagreb).

While the pompous phrases of the International Women's Section of the "Fidac" (International Federation of Ex-Servicemen of the Entente countries and America) resound in Belgrade in praise of the work done by the Yugoslav section in the interest of a maintenance of peace, the first reliable reports issue from the police gaol of that city in regard to the sufferings and torments of those women that have been imprisoned by the ruling Government in its desire to stamp out the revolutionary movement of the working masses, so as to have absolute freedom to carry on war preparations. While preparations are being made for the "pacifist" congress resolved by the Berlin International Congress of Feminists, an event to be held at Belgrade "in honour of Yugoslavia's pacifist policy" ("Vreme" of June 26th. 1929), the monarchist military dictatorship wages constant war on workers of both sexes, on the working men and women of Yugoslavia.

Among the many prisoners and victims there are numerous women, whose names are gradually becoming known in spite of the police practice of false lists.

Besides the garment worker Anka Buturatz, who was arrested and most cruelly tortured five months ago, the prisoners in the police gaol of Zagreb comprise the textile-worker Anka Grzetitch and her sister Rosa, both of whom have been most brutally beaten, (Anka in particular). It is thought that the woman who is said to have "jumped" out of the window of the gaol, thereby incurring considerable injuries, must have been either Anka Grzetitch or else Yagica Oreshki, the widow of